

193. *Mr. Leather.*] You have some leases over here [Place indicated], have you not?—We have very big areas—some freehold, some leasehold.

194. Were there any borings here [Place indicated] prior to the syndicate starting work?—No, I think not.

195. Have you done any prospecting along here before they started [Place indicated on plan]? No; but, of course, we knew that the coal was in this part, and we have 30 ft. of coal here [Places indicated].

196. Where is it dipping?—Towards the lake.

197. You did not prospect here [Place indicated] prior to our starting?—No; the company put down no bores there that I know of before you started. They knew there was coal in that direction.

198. Are you aware that there is a big piece of barren country here [Place indicated]?—No, I am not—not where you are pointing out.

199. It is not intended by your company to put in a stone drive to connect the coal here [Indicated] and work this ground [Indicated]?—We are making a roadway now, and have been for some time.

200. You are going to put in a big stone drive, are you not?—No; simply a drive through the coal. You know that the portion of roadway driven through stone was because a roll in the seam of coal was encountered, and, of course, when a roadway is being made it must be made at a given grade. The work is going on so as to arrive at a certain depth where the coal is here alongside the lake [Place indicated on plan]. The heading is now through the stone belt, and is being extended through the coal.

201. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] How much Crown land does your company hold altogether?—We have only the lake-area in this proximity.

202. I mean altogether; how much Crown land does the company hold altogether, under different leases?—I could not say definitely how much. I think 100 acres of the Waikato River. The company holds a lease of probably 200 or 300 acres at Kimihia, but that area is leased from the trustees of the Auckland University College.

203. *Mr. J. Allen.*] In addition to this?—Yes; another property a long way from Lake Wahi.

204. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] How long is it since your company applied for this ground?—I gave you the date. On the 22nd August, 1902.

205. Were those men prospecting there then?—I do not know. I would like to look at the papers to see the date on which they applied.

206. *Mr. J. Allen.*] The money for the 100 acres was received on the 4th August, 1902. That was prior to the company's application.

207. *Mr. R. McKenzie.*] This ground had been lying idle for some years, I suppose?—Yes.

208. And neither your company nor any one else wanted it, did they?—The company has been working towards the lake for years past, and the developments went to show the coal was going in that direction.

209. But you never made any application for the ground prior to these men applying, did you?—No; we made no application till the 22nd August, 1902. We were unaware that they were prospecting. I knew nothing of their prospecting; I never heard a word about them.

210. You were aware that they had found coal there?—No; they absolutely refused to give any information to anybody.

211. But this information is shown to have been supplied to the Commissioner of Crown Lands at Auckland?—Perhaps so; but he would not give the information to the company, and the syndicate would not. Mr. Leather told me one day prior to the meeting of shareholders in 1894 about having found coal there. That was a long time afterwards.

212. This is what you are reported in the newspaper of the 19th January, 1904, to have said: "Mr. Ralph then proceeded to explain that in 1902 a syndicate called the Huntly Coal-prospecting Syndicate made application to the Crown Lands Commissioner for 100 acres of Lake Wahi. Mr. Ralph received information that the application had been made. A meeting of directors was called, and the company applied for the whole area of the lake, some 1,250 acres, and after much pressure the Government granted 250 acres." Who did you bring that pressure on—the Minister of Mines, the Premier, or the Commissioner of Crown Lands? Were you, or was Mr. Gordon the active agent in bringing the pressure?—Mr. Gordon had very little to do with it.

213. Who was the agent that brought this pressure to bear on the Government?—No agent. The secretary to the company did nearly all the business, and the pressure is contained in the correspondence which I have submitted to you.

214. Did you take any part in it—"after much pressure," you say?—There was continuous correspondence on the matter. The Commissioner would not grant us the ground straight away as he should have done.

215. Did you have a private interview with the Minister of Mines or the Premier?—No; not one private interview with the Minister of Mines or the Premier, nor with any one connected with the Government. The whole business was dealt with by the company in the most open manner with the Department at Auckland, and the communications were almost wholly between Mr. Mueller and the secretary of the company.

216. I understand that you are chairman of directors of the company?—Yes.

217. Would it not be your place to look after all this pressure? Would you be the agent who would have charge of it?—My duty is to do that which is in the interests of the company, and I tell you that I had no interview with the Minister of Mines or any Minister of the Crown.

218. Who did you bring this pressure to bear on?—On the Commissioner of Crown Lands, in the form set out in the documents put before you.

219. What was the nature of the pressure?—Do you not think it is considerable pressure to make an application on the 22nd August, 1902, and have all this correspondence pass afterwards?